

The Mind's Eye

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The Mind's Eye invites contributions. Your research, comment,
reflections, reviews, poetry, fiction are welcome.

The Editor's File

BACK TO BASICS

by Charles A. McIsaac

Frank E. Armbruster's book Our Children's Crippled Future: How American Education Has Failed (Quadrangle, 1977), which was briefly mentioned in September's Mind's Eye as a back-to-tradition treatise, got itself roundly condemned in the Massachusetts Teacher (September/October) for almost every conceivable offense. The reviewer, George Abbott White, has no good words for it, granting it at best an opprobrious kind of consistency in its "rhetorical overkill, the casual regard for facts and their context, the perverse mythmaking, and the feeble attempts at scholarship." Strong words. White picks out for special attention Armbruster's claim that students of the 1910s and 1930s did better than their modern counterparts in reading and other basic skills, as reflected in the results of standardized tests. Not so, says the reviewer; the author's interpretation of the data is defective. We who graduated from high school in the 1930s, and remember how it was, whisper amen.

These strictures notwithstanding, it is nonetheless apparent that a problem exists. The growing unease with schooling and the spreading controversy about so-called "basics" in education are evidence of a fever which is destined to rage as long as society perceives its educational product to be inferior. We are obviously engulfed in a cultural process of formidable dimensions, analysis of which would be presumptuous in this space. But we may ask some questions.

What, in fact, are basics in this transmogrified world? Has society become so misshapen and bizarre that traditional values have no relevance? Can the social vehicle be, as it were, tin-knocked back into recognizable form and returned, with current inspection sticker, to the high road of Western culture? One fervently hopes so, for the map currently available to us shows no other route to human

fulfillment. A plausible alternative to the Greco-Roman, Judeo-Christian tradition does not present itself.

But un-success with the young makes us wonder, as it does Armbruster and the legions for whom he speaks. The dismayed decline in SAT scores has resisted the scrutiny of numerous studies. Our children are off in the fields picking strange flowers. How do we get them back? By stern command? By accommodation? Neither works well in the end result.

Is it conceivable that the accumulated weight of twenty-five centuries of learning is too much to bear? That its freight cannot be delivered? Does the knowledge/information explosion make both teaching and learning feckless? Impossible on its face, we say; man cannot produce more information than he can comprehend. He can't? This is debatable. As we advance toward the end of the twentieth century, it has become so hard to absorb and organize our augmented corpus of data that instruction is taxed nearly beyond professional capacity to keep abreast, and the task of transmitting knowledge is complicated to the extent that simplification/fragmentation techniques are seemingly unavoidable. This runs the risk of rupturing the skein of connected concepts which we view as the indispensable framework of Western civilization.

Seeing it this way, educators have properly been alarmed. Civilized man must maintain an organic relation to his roots; he cuts loose from them at his peril. Harvard College is currently leading the way back, through curriculum reform, to a cohesive core of knowledge to which everyone in the human family is a rightful heir. Encapsulated, the Harvard program proposes that an educated person entering society from college should be acquainted with the methods of the natural sciences, the main forms of analysis used in the

social sciences, some of the important scholarly, literary, and artistic achievements of the past, and the major religious and philosophical conceptions of man. Thus society, askew of late, will be re-emplaced on its legitimate foundation.

This is well and good. But legitimacy is one thing in college, with its selected population, and quite another thing in the mass culture of the high school. There, it seems, are the greater problems: the shaping of the tender-tough, alienated young; the reduction of unbearable, community-derived tensions; the leading-on to philosophical detachment through liberal engagement--intimacy with history, understanding of science, the stirring of authentic social feeling, and admiration of art and literature as transcendent forces. How do we do this? Can it in fact be brought off, given the matrix from which high school students come? Radio, television, and motion pictures have endowed us with a postliterate generation, a new segment of society divorced in significant part from the printed word and hostile to the values we hold dear.

For the blame for this, we must look to ourselves: we invented movies, radio, and TV, and the commercialism which sustains them. Our response is to provide education in the same format: audio and video. The bill for this is enormous, and we cannot pay it out of income gained from commercial messages beamed to a nationwide consumer audience.

We have, it seems, put ourselves in a bind.

CAPE COD'S WATER DEFENDED

See the letter of John M. Kelly, Director of Public Health, Town of Barnstable, in the October Country Journal for a point-by-point refutation of William B. Walker's "The Poisoning of Cape Cod" (July Country Journal, reviewed in the September Mind's Eye). Kelly cites studies, tests, and facts to discredit Walker. "None of these studies substantiate Mr. Walker's poorly researched, ill-advised propaganda," he writes. Country Journal disagrees.

MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS AND THE POLITICAL ECONOMY

by Robert Bence

The postindustrial age caught most American students of politics by surprise. We had been busily creating our various models of political systems, with their pressure groups, electoral games, and intergovernmental relationships, and had not noticed how national and international politics were being shaped by economics. While examining the comparative merits of Jeffersonian rural republicanism and Hamiltonian oligarchy, we ironically ignored the expansion of the most potentially important political force in this century --the development of the multinational corporations. Of course, we all knew corporations were powerful competitors for government rewards, but we were unaware of how they were beginning to be the primary force in shaping and defining the nature of political conflict..

By definition multinational corporations are very large profit-making enterprises that have resource extraction, production, and marketing operations in a multitude of nation-states. U.S. multinationals dominate the field, but European and Japanese companies try harder. Statistical comparisons abound to astound us with the size and complexity of these global giants. For example, the wealth of General Motors equals that which is at the disposal of the French government, and Standard Oil of New Jersey (Exxon) has a fleet of ships which surpasses the size of the Russian merchant marine.

If wealth is a measure of political power, multinationals have to be considered top potential political contenders in the international and national arenas. Another index of political power is knowledge, and again multinationals score well, since they command much, if not most, of the world's technological expertise. This power has had visible effects on the less developed nations and their unsophisticated political systems. Not all of these effects have been beneficial, as Richard Barnet and Ronald Muller docu-

ment in their critical work on multinationals, Global Reach. The authors argue persuasively that multinationals are not the collective messiah of modern development, spreading the joys of technology and Western-style happiness, but instead become undeveloping institutions that take precious finance capital from the poor nations, destroy--through mechanization--more jobs than they create, and using the best of Western television ("I Love Lucy" reruns), sell Pepsi-Cola and Twinkies to people whose nutrition level is already dangerously low. The defenders of multinationals, like Lee Iacocca, president of Ford Motor Company, counter that their global operations are the only organized force for internationalism, and nation-states are the basic obstacle to the major impetus for world peace--the profit motive. Indeed, the case can effectively be made for the nonideological and integrative nature of multinationals. Gulf Oil is equally at home in Marxist Angola (where Cuban troops protect Gulf's wells) and the fascist Republic of South Africa. Recent U.S. business overtures to the Soviet Union lead one to ask, Is Mack Truck winning the Cold War?

Certainly, multinationals have the tested ability to effect political allocation of resources in the economically desperate regimes of the Third World. But what is their level of political power in the land of the free and the home of the brave? Multinationals owe much of their growth to deliberate public policy decisions of many presidential administrations. Tax loopholes, government underwriting of insurance against expropriation and other overseas risks, government-subsidized loans and credit for foreign trade and investment have made it possible and desirable for multinationals to spread into more and more countries. Beginning with the Marshall Plan, U.S. companies have been rewarded by the U.S. taxpayer (indirectly of course) for international expansion. To expand upon the wisdom of Calvin Coolidge, the business of America became the business of the world. The effects of this expansion are debatable, but recent testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee indicates that the U.S. may have lost 1,062,577 jobs between 1966

and 1973 due to overseas expansion of U.S. companies, and the huge amount of transfer capital in the hands of multinationals and their affiliated banks may be a primary cause of the continual U.S. balance-of-payments deficit.

The most crucial influence of the multinationals on the U.S. political economy may be a very subtle one. The fewer and fewer multinationals who dominate more and more of the national and world economic systems are possibly too big for even the U.S. government to control. These companies have information, technology, and resource and marketing operations able to shape political priorities beyond the imagination of Adam Smith. So when President Carter and James Schlesinger attempt to solve the energy crisis, they must deal with the needs of the multinationals, who know how to research, explore, and develop. To not deal with the needs of these companies risks short term, and possibly long term, politico-economic chaos. In effect, the multinationals have defined the boundaries of political conflict. Because of their economic power they cannot be seriously challenged. The anti-oil speeches of President Carter are rhetoric, or symbolic politics. The government which sponsored the Sherman Antitrust Act to curb monopolies is no longer the controller, but the controlled. The U.S. government finds itself in virtually the same position as that of an underdeveloped country. The critical questions are, then, Is the power of the multinationals to define the scope of politics dangerous, and does this development require countervailing forces which at the present time do not exist?

(For the sake of brevity I have not included my sources, but would be glad to share them with any interested readers.)

J. ROBERT OPPENHEIMER

Harold Green in "The Oppenheimer Case: A Study in the Abuse of Law" (Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, September) examines the guilt-by-association case which banished from public life the great physicist who fathered the atomic bomb.

GOOD OLD GOLDEN RULE DAYS

by Ellen Schiff

IMAGES FOR ORCHESTRA

by Arnold Bartini

I. Brahms

Vermilion carpets
 plunging marble stairwells;
 pewter candelabras
 igniting symmetrical shadows
 in plush chambers.

II. Sibelius

Spruce tang permeating
 frozen white groves;
 cataracts crashing
 the awesome still
 of morning star.

III. Tchaikovsky

Roman candles
 firing incandescent vapor trails;
 ivy-clung castle walls
 going under
 tree shadows.

IV. Stravinsky

Inferno red sun,
 ablaze with itself
 victimizing tropical horizons;
 anemic spectres,
 dripping colorless blood
 in cancer death orgies.

V. Vaughan Williams

Stark clock tower
 laced against cloud ripples;
 ineffable peace
 of morning blue mist
 before the bird stir.

MISS MARGARIDA'S WAY, a play written and directed by Roberto Athayde. Presented by the New York Shakespeare Festival, Joseph Papp, producer. At the Ambassador Theatre, 215 W. 49th St., N.Y.

It is difficult for anybody who has ever spent any amount of time in a classroom to remain untouched by Roberto Athayde's Miss Margarida's Way, a New York Shakespeare Festival production which has just moved uptown to the Ambassador Theatre. The play is a tour de force for Estelle Parsons who is virtually alone on stage for an hour and a half in the role of an eighth-grade teacher. Egomaniacal (she refers to herself mostly in the third person), dictatorial, sex-starved, foul-mouthed, and astonishingly ill-informed, Miss Margarida's sole qualification for classroom service is her indefatigability. Her muddled lessons tumble one upon the other, never finished, always ending up in biology, a specialty Miss Margarida claims she tutors privately, but refuses to pursue in class, "no matter how much you rotten punks want me to." The desultory sequence of lessons is punctuated by an apparently endless supply of textbooks which the teacher extracts from a tiny cupboard drawer, only to strew them about the schoolroom where they lie as oppressive litter reminiscent of Ionesco's teacups and chairs.

The proliferation of dead matter is not the only parallel between the work of that master of absurd theatre and Athayde's play. In his chilling one-acter, The Lesson, Ionesco demonstrates how a professor's overzealousness in converting his pupils to his own patterns of expression lead him to rape and murder those students. As that professor's philosophical maid observes, philology leads to calamity. Miss Margarida's Way also hammers home the point that she who controls the word controls society. "I'll write that on the board so you can memorize it," Miss Margarida says again and again, covering an enormous greenboard with a potpourri

of misspellings and misinformation that, she never stops emphasizing, are all required knowledge for the final exams. And without those final exams, her students will never, ever pass into high school; without them, they will be barred forever from college and from graduate school. "And Miss Margarida wants all of you to become doctors," she proclaims, leering at her charges.

All of these obvious exaggerations might be passed off as stage conventions designed to amuse, were there a group of actors in the house to portray an apparently overcrowded class of eighth-graders. But there is only one daring young man, seated in the fifth row of the audience. Occasionally he dashes onto stage in response to the teacher's calls for a volunteer. Once there, he runs into a barrage of humiliation and reproach which leaves him mute and limp. It is the actual audience in the theatre which is pressed into functioning as Miss Margarida's students. She threads her way through the balcony, making sure people are in their places; she insults latecomers exactly as an insensitive teacher might; she addresses the audience precisely as if it were an obstreperous crowd of not very bright grammar school kids. Indeed, Estelle Parsons makes her second act entrance through the lobby, angrily shooing theatregoers back to their seats and screaming recriminations at those who have used the "recess" to decorate the stage greenboard with entirely appropriate graffiti.

Plays often work by making their audiences draw on some shared historical awareness. This play uses that device with unremitting, deadly aim. Shortly after Miss Margarida's first entrance, she assures her students that she knows exactly how they feel. They are as inextricably trapped in that classroom as they are in life. "How many of you were consulted about your own birth?" she asks, reminding the spectator of his own years in school-rooms where, it seemed to him, everything of immediate interest and relevance was eclipsed by a colossus of information he was told he must master in the prescribed manner, and where he as individual became fodder in the mass to be processed through

the grades.

That the play reawakens those memories is eloquently demonstrated by the increasing enthusiasm with which the audience plays its role. Early in the first act, it dutifully parrots the preposterous anthem Miss Margarida teaches it; by the second act, having had a chance to vandalize the classroom during intermission, it dares to pelt her with jeers, spitballs, and paper airplanes.

It is not just New York audiences who respond to Miss Margarida's Way. Since 1971, the play has been produced fifty-five times in more than twenty languages. This scathing portrayal of compulsory education is the work of a young man who, at the age of twenty-one, had acquired enough of a career as a school dropout in his native Brazil, in France, and in the United States to speak out with authority and compelling conviction. It might be tempting to debate Roberto Athayde's perceptions. It would be foolhardy to ignore them.

ON HUNTING

by Michael Haines

For me, fall is the harvest season. There is something very comfortable in the cyclical changes: I could never stand to live in California or Florida or Hawaii--I seem to need the security of the seasonal flow.

And the part of the cycle I feel now is the harvesting mood. At this time of year, I usually lament that I didn't put in more garden. I savor the fall family outing to pick apples. I really miss the ripening corn and wheat fields of my native Midwest, but I am compensated somewhat by New England's spectacular foliage.

However, the real harvest that stirs me at this time of year is the same one that excites my Brittany Spaniel. I watch him sniff the breeze that swirls the leaves around his doghouse, and I feel it, too. It's in our blood, I guess: by nature,

I'm as much a hunter as he is.

To my more civilized colleagues in the academy, my longing for the hunt must seem a strange and unbecoming barbarity. But I come from a subculture where hunting was as natural a harvesting activity as picking corn, "combining" wheat, or butchering pigs. True, I have come a long way--geographically and spiritually--from that Ohio farm country. And I agree with Wolfe that I can't go home. The New England woods, though, seem to draw me as naturally as the Ohio fields and fence rows once did.

And it seems to me that it's more than just the hunting experiences of my youth that draws me. It is, I think, centuries--millenia, perhaps--of racial memory; it really is akin to the stirrings in my spaniel who was bred to be a hunter.

One could argue that my longing is simply the result of enculturation or tradition. I began to hunt because my father did, his father took him, and I suppose my grandfather's father took him. The cycle continues: I took my son hunting for the first time this year. And so it goes.

One could argue that hunting derives its importance from its role in history. Jose Ortega y Gasset, a twentieth-century Spanish philosopher, in his essay "Meditations on Hunting," has noted that in the history of Western man two activities have dominated his leisure time--dancing and hunting. Something made hunting a priority--possibly its value in keeping the warrior class in fighting condition. (NRA types still use this rather specious defense.)

One could argue--and I think I would--that there really is "something in the blood," or to use more modern terminology, there is still in our genetic inheritance a remnant of the hunting instinct that once was a necessity for our very survival. Robert Ardrey's most recent book, The Hunting Hypothesis, argues eloquently and fairly convincingly that hunting was a crucial development in our evolution.

Whatever the origin of my "primitive stir-

rings"--whether a deeply ingrained part of my racial unconscious, a continuation of a long history of a popular leisure activity, or simply the passing on of a family tradition--I feel those longings every year at this time. And I choose not to suppress those longings. The continuation of the hunting cycle is as satisfying and as comforting as the cycle of the seasons--and, I think, just as natural.

In Brief

NO PLOT AGAINST JFK

"An arrow launched into the air to kill a foreign leader may well have fallen back to kill our own," writes Daniel Schorr in "The Assassins" (New York Review of Books, October 13). Schorr, the former CBS correspondent, exhaustively reviews the evidence of CIA plots against Castro's life and the clues to a plot to assassinate John F. Kennedy. The facts appear to prove the CIA was heavily involved in efforts to dispose of Castro. But there is no proof of an overt Cuban conspiracy against the American president. Nevertheless, Lee Harvey Oswald, deeply disaffected by U.S. actions against Castro, may well have been sensitized by Castro's retaliatory protests into a kind of mental conspiracy against Kennedy. Schorr's theory: "The 'conspiracy,' then, would have been a conspiracy of interlocking events--the incessant CIA plots to kill Castro, touching off a Castro warning, touching off something in the fevered mind of Lee Harvey Oswald."

THE WAR TO COME

In "Lest We Forget: The Thoughts of Three Nobel Laureates on War and Peace" (Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, September) Philip Noel-Baker, Alfred Kastler, and Sean MacBride speculate on the future nuclear war. For each, the key to the real probabilities is the growth of armaments budgets in all nations, large and small. MacBride: "Another fantasy, against which we must be on guard, is the idea that responsible governments will never use nuclear energy for war purposes.

They have used it once, so how can we sit back and expect that they will not use it in the future?" Kastler: "There is no need to be a great scholar or great prophet to see that the human race is rushing toward its suicide." Noel-Baker: "I am going to submit that there is really only one major problem before mankind, that is, to demilitarize the governments and societies of the world. We must release the resources wasted on what is now called defense, when there is no defense, to solve our other problems."

RIGHTS OF THE OPPRESSED

Two articles on the celebrated Bakke case merit particular attention. Extended treatment is accorded in McGeorge Bundy's "The Issue Before the Court: Who Gets Ahead in America?" (Atlantic, November). Says Bundy: "No one is arguing for the admission of the unqualified, and there is no finding in Bakke that such admissions have occurred. . . . The question is much more subtle: Among the qualified, how shall we choose?" Bundy's essay is important because it presents the position of the Ford Foundation--of which he is president--which has invested \$150 million over ten years in support of affirmative action in undergraduate, graduate, and professional schools.

A close sociolegal analysis by Ronald Dworkin, author of Taking Rights Seriously (Harvard, 1977), is offered in "Why Bakke Has No Case" in the New York Review of Books of November 10. From the accepted premise that American society is racially conscious--we have a history of slavery, repression, and prejudice--Dworkin develops a brief for affirmative action. The dissolution of racism depends on our ability to integrate oppressed minorities into the professions by "allowing the fact of their race to count affirmatively as part of the case for admitting them." Bakke's argument, that he should not be excluded from medical school because of his race alone, is rejected on the ground that there is no history of prejudice or contempt toward the white race to which Mr. Bakke belongs.

--Charles A. McIsaac

NEWSWEEK WATCH

Samples of Sarah Clarke's Newsweek Watch. The full version is at the library desk.

"The Middle Class Poor." September 12, pp. 30-34. Trying to live up to the middle-class expectations of the '50s and '60s, many Americans have gone into debt.

"A Sense of Mortality." September 26, pp. 74-78. The sudden death of poet Robert Lowell is marked by a sensitive, thoughtful obituary by Jack Kroll.

"Sputnik Plus 20: The U.S. on Top." October 10, pp. 52-67. Moscow bureau chief Fred Coleman, with associated correspondents, investigated the state of science, medicine, and education in the U.S. and Russia, discovering that the U.S. remains technologically superior in each.

"At Long Last, Love." October 24, pp. 80-85. The phenomenon of reversed-age couples, long familiar in the older man/younger woman relationship, is beginning to show an older woman/younger man trend.

Contributors

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